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JESUS AND MODERN CIVIC LIFE

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The trying-out place of religion is the city. Here life is at its intensest. Here man deals directly and almost solely with man, for nature is reduced to subjection by the city. And all human relations raise moral questions. The city is the ganglion of the world's unrest. It paints large the social inequalities of the day, the industrial maladjustment, the contrasts of riches and poverty.

There is a pretty general impression that the city is not congenial soil for religion, and that the big centers of population are inevitably the last to respond to the religious appeal. I think the facts are otherwise. There is less vice in the city than in the town, and in the town than in the village, and in the village than in the country. The great variety of interests which the city offers and the unrelenting demand of city activities leave smaller place for the grosser forms of temptation than the less occupied rural life. City minds may be beaten hard by much traffic like city streets, but things pass over them more quickly. The city goes about its own business with apparent indifference, but its heart is not bad. St. John's idea of heaven is a city.

But the city is strategic. Cities are destined to become bigger and bigger. They are running over into the country and giving to country life the characteristics of city life. Cities will more and more dominate the country. And it is here that the religion of Jesus has its supreme opportunity.

It was only for prudential reasons that Jesus turned from the city to the towns and country. He realized the significance of the centers of population and seats of government, and he began at Jerusalem, as his disciples were later bidden to do—I follow John's order which on every count seems to me historical whatever may be said of the discourses. But he was embarrassed by his urban popularity, and for the safeguarding of his total work he

withdrew to the country. When the time had come the man of Galilee went down and joined issue with Jerusalem. He wept over the city, and outside its wall he died.

The organized spirit of Jesus is the church. It is the immediate agency through which the teachings of Jesus are to be impressed upon modern life. But the church is not joining issue with the cities. It is beating retreat from the points of danger. It is moving away from the foreigner and the dancehall and the saloon and settling down comfortably in the quiet suburbs. The stampede of churches from the congested part of the city would be a dismal fact to contemplate but for this other fact: the men who touch the life of the city most potently live in the suburbs and there are within reach of the church. Suburban churches are practically city churches. And the church which in the future will bear most heavily upon the city is the church in the suburbs whose men are men of large affairs and have in their keeping the well-being of a big part of the city population.

Nevertheless, the village is overchurched and the city underchurched. Home missionaries are sent to the disappearing Indians and the scattered peoples of mountains and plains, while in the cities hundreds of thousands have no teacher of religion but the newspaper, which is inadequate. The church of the city is losing its former prestige, and moral leadership is being assumed by the magazines. Statesmen are speaking more plainly on great moral issues than clergymen. I am not jealous of the magazine writer with his half-million readers or of the political leader who is read throughout the land. Every voice that speaks with an authority that the world heeds is interpreting Christ. I am not jealous of the school, the hospital, the settlement. They are evidence of how far society has been christianized. These agencies may be trusted to perpetuate for a time the Christian civilization which the church has produced. But any further progress toward Christian ideals requires the initiative of the church. If the christianizing of the cities is to make head, the church's voice must be heard too. The church is the official organ of Jesus.

In order that the religion of Christ may be more effective in the cities, there needs to be a religious propaganda that is more per-

sistently and intelligently directed. It must be adapted to the city. At present the church is baffled by the city. We ministers are dismayed by the swing of the city from the church. The city seems almost as impenetrable as darkest Africa. We have almost given up trying to cope with it. But the city is being coped with by other agencies at work within its walls. As cities grow, the questions of housing the people, of food supply, and of transportation become increasingly difficult, but they are being successfully handled. The schools and the amusement venders meet the situation. The theatrical man is not aghast over the apartment house nor the merchant in despair over the shifting population. The politician gets his appeal to the voters and the voters to the polls. The city problem is handled now.

And the church can solve it, too, if we give the same sort of thought to the problem. Elsewhere antiquated methods have given place to modern methods, and the equipment of a few years ago is torn out for equipment that is up to date. The churches are using the equipment of fifty years ago and are conducting their public worship and parish activities almost without change. The church's maladjustment to its environment is most strikingly illustrated by the fact that most of our city churches are trying to meet city conditions with an elaborated country-church program. The general merchandise store at the crossroads has given place to the department store, but the city church is only a larger and more elaborate country church.

The church must set itself in earnest to the solution of the city problem as distinct from the country problem. It must have a city program. And we shall be wise if we learn from those who have mastered the city problem: the merchant, the theater-manager, the educator, the politician. Of course they have the advantage of us as the needs they supply are more pressing and immediate, but there is in the heart of man a need of religion, too, though we may have to interpret it. True, we will have to create a demand for the church, but this we can do when we make it supply the religious needs of all the people. There must be a way to capture the imagination of the city for Christ as for a political idol. Christ is forever the world's hero.

But the bottom difficulty is that the church has not thought of itself as existing for the city. Hence it has not seriously grappled the city problem. It has not changed its program, because it has existed for itself. It has used too much of its power just to keep the machinery going and left too little for the raw material upon which the church should operate. Churches have died through too much trying to preserve their own life. They have thought of their minister as one employed to look after them and please them. If only they would think of themselves as a missionary enterprise, and forget their own life in the effort to bring life to others, they would find the life that abounds.

A scientific definition of life is conformity with environment. And the prime thing for a living church is to be adapted to its environment and to have a constructive program by which it can serve its own community. A church must meet the needs of the community in which it is located, and it must not be guided by the needs of some other community or some other age. In making out its program the modern test of efficiency should be applied. An institution should not be perpetuated simply because it is hallowed by antiquity. If a meeting or organization requires more effort to keep it going than it contributes life and power to the church, it is uneconomic and wasteful and should be given up. This test may eliminate some traditional forms of church activity. But what we are after is efficiency, not uniformity. It will cost a pang to give up some venerable forms of church work, but if they make no real contribution to the community and are not vital to the usefulness of the church, it will hurt less to discontinue them than to try and keep them alive by galvanizing an interest which is not real.

Churches are now placed in the neighborhoods which are most hospitable to the church. Those of the city's population who most need to be evangelized are thus farthest removed from the churches. In all probability, save in the case of a few churches strategically located, we shall have to abandon our church buildings after the morning service and reach the people in halls and theaters and on the street. But we must reach them! We believe that in the teachings of Jesus we have what the city needs. Our difficulty is

that of distribution. It is a difficulty which others have solved, and we must solve it too. It matters not what changes are necessary, we must find a way to make our Christian propaganda effective. When a church building ceases to be a point of contact and becomes rather a barrier in the way of getting the ear of the people, we must try some other way of approach.

Having found the method of bringing Christ to bear upon the city, what shall be our message? Here, too, we must remember that the religious problems of the city differ from those of the country in that they are mainly social. The Christian teacher cannot address the city as he would the country, if Christ's religion is really to grip city life. The city man is less put to it by questions of personal morality than the country man, as already intimated, because his mind and heart are more occupied. But he has to deal with the larger questions of social morality where the issues are not so clear. It is in the uncharted world of modern industry that men go astray. As to individual ethics there is little new to say. But the teachings of Jesus need to be put in terms of economic and industrial and social relationships.

The religion of Jesus is pre-eminently the religion of the city. He always treats man as a member of society. A hermit's cell is the poorest sort of place for Christian living. But in the new world of industry men deal with men in ways where they are at a loss when they try to apply the teachings of Jesus. We religious teachers have announced his principles and left it to men to apply them. They do not know how. The industrial world has outgrown our moral standards and men do not know whether they are following Christ or not. Many feel that something is wrong somewhere, but they have been caught by the slow drift of the system and do not know how to do otherwise. Some frankly say that to observe the Golden Rule would mean to be put out of business.

Now to make the religion of Jesus effective the Christian minister must show how Christ's teachings connect with the problems of the working day. Many men are eager to be guided. Others do not want to be disturbed, and if one minister here or there begins to point out what the Golden Rule means in industry and commerce they will call him a disturber. But should all of us be at it, using

tact and kindness and intelligence, we could lead the men of our churches honestly to face the requirements of Christ.

The problem which presses hardest in the city is the problem of the distribution of the products of labor. Some are struggling for the bare necessities of life and some have to spare. And this situation has come about not because men are greedy for gold and indifferent to the sufferings of their fellows. It does not arise out of the nature of our present industrial system. It arises out of the fact that every man wants to achieve success in his undertaking and that success in the industrial world has been measured by the money a man has made. He is driven to get together as much money as he can, for that is the evidence that he has succeeded.

The situation is to be saved, therefore, not so much by a new economic program as by a new spirit in industry. Government regulation and economic readjustment will be effective only when the religious spirit has created a new form of competition—the competition in service. This Jesus supplies us: “He that would be greatest among you let him be your servant.” Here is a new measure of success, a new standard of greatness. Let it be adopted generally and the scramble for money will cease. Then the question, “How much is he worth?” will mean, How much is he worth to the community? Then a business will be counted most successful not when it extracts most from the community and pays the largest dividends, but when it contributes most to the prosperity and happiness of the community. Then any industry which exists by paying starvation wages will be counted not only uneconomic, as we even now reckon it, but immoral.

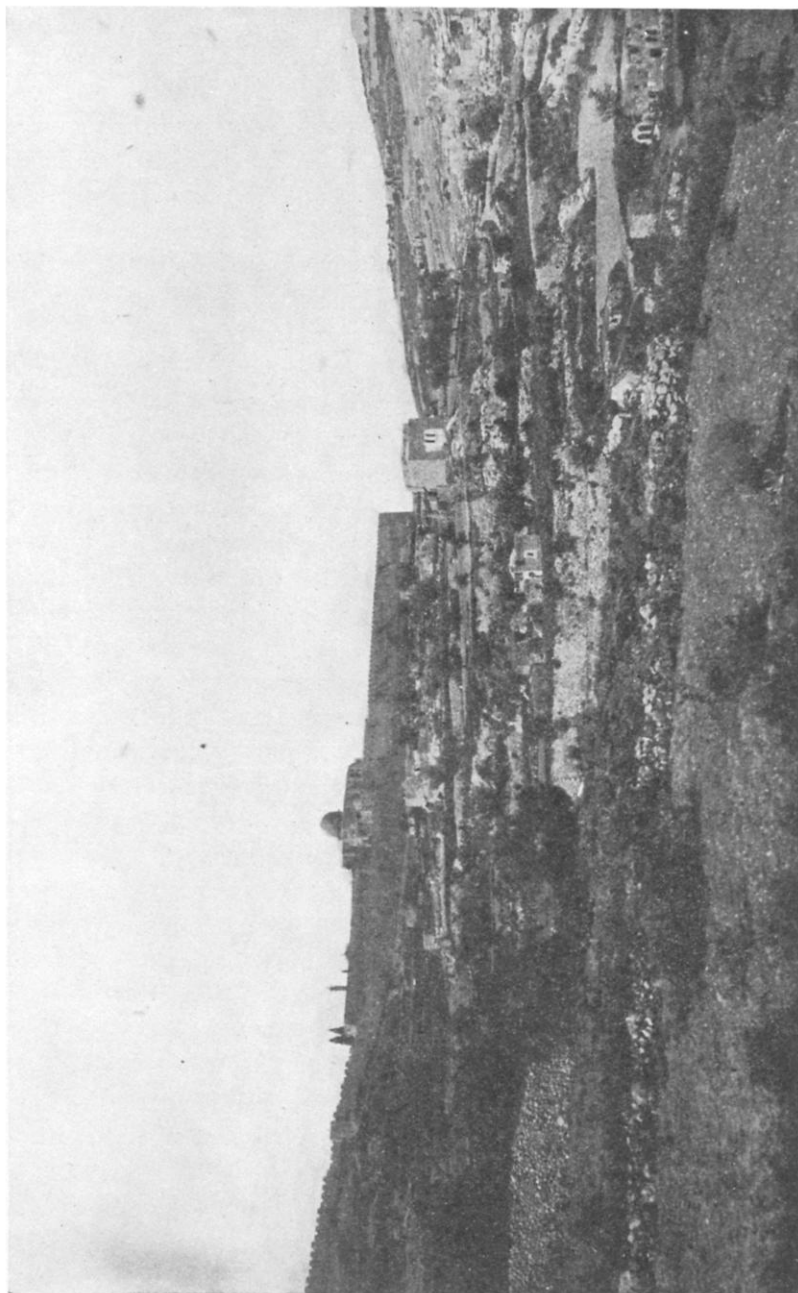
Christian men now say they are enmeshed by the system and cannot pay more wages. They can if they are content with smaller dividends. And they will be content with less profit when they have learned to measure their success not by the money they make but by the service they render in the way of larger wages and a better and cheaper product.

To establish such a measure of success is not difficult, for most men really want to follow Christ. Those who have more than they need would be willing to get along with less if it were not that wealth stands for success. And when an enlightened Christian

conscience measures their success not by the riches they have accumulated but by the wealth they have distributed in the community, then will the incentive for piling up dividends be removed. In no other field of endeavor do we measure success by the money it wins. A man's success in art, science, statecraft, medicine, teaching, the ministry is not reckoned by the money he piles up; we hold him in less esteem who prostitutes any one of these to mere money-getting. The soldier gives himself to his country and his wage is a pittance. The army officer feels it no humiliation to be poor. And we may expect the same chivalry in business that we have in war and some of the professions.

The men engaged in money-making pursuits are not less fine than those engaged in activities where money-making is out of the question. But the former have been led to attach a false significance to money because it is the popular measure of success. The money standard must be changed if the heart of the city is to be really Christian. It is now being changed. Some men now think of their business as a trust to be administered for Christ's kingdom. And the Christian teacher must not fail to make clear in all faith and tenderness that the amassing of great wealth may be according to Christ's standards a sign of failure, in that it means service withheld from the community instead of service rendered.

I have no program of city redemption to suggest. But of this I am convinced: The expert Christian teacher must grapple with the city problem and find a way of getting the religion of Jesus to all the people. And the next step he must take is to popularize Christ's standard of success.



JERUSALEM FROM THE SOUTH: THE CITY OF DAVID IN THE FOREGROUND